

Pamela Smart's Mother Maintains Her Strength — Belief in Daughter

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CONCORD — When she goes out in public, Linda Wojas is no longer Linda Wojas, middle-class mother of three. She hasn't played that ordinary role for nearly three years.

Instead, she is Linda Wojas, mother of convicted murder-accomplice Pamela Smart, and it's a label she detests.

"You're not who you are. You're Pam Smart's mother," she says. "Do people think that I'm going away? Because I'm not going away. I'm not."

Smart, 26, is serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. She was convicted in March 1991 of being an accomplice to the murder of her husband, Gregory. Her trial commanded worldwide media attention and resulted in, at last count, three books and one made-for-TV movie.

Since then, Wojas has been her daughter's chief supporter in a network of people linked by the belief that Smart is innocent, or at least did not get a fair trial.

"That's their agenda, if you will," Wojas said recently in a lengthy telephone interview. "They're angry, and they're frightened at what they saw."

Others say the jury reached the right verdict and Smart was justly punished for an unthinkable crime. The New Hampshire Supreme Court rejected her claim that her trial was unfair, and the U.S. Supreme Court declined to review the ruling.

Perhaps nobody knows the case more intimately than Wojas, 52, who holds fast to her belief that her daughter will one day be free.

To that end, she has bent her efforts — writing letters to supporters, seeking information, praying that someone will listen.

At a forum sponsored by the state bar association to let the public meet judges, Wojas submitted written questions bearing on issues raised during Smart's trial.

One was whether it is common practice to print a defendant's name on a summons for jury selection.

"That's a legitimate question," she said.

Her questions went unanswered.

"What I expect, I guess, is too much. I expect answers," she said. "This is three years of 'push this under the rug.' ... I'm glad God didn't make me a wimp."

Since their daughter's trial, the prosperous, middle-class life of Linda and Linda Wojas has been cold.

They have rented out the Smart house where they raised their children and moved



Jim Cole/AP Photo

LINDA WOJAS talks to reporters during the trial of her daughter, Pamela Smart, in March 1991. Almost three years later, Wojas still feels engulfed by the case. Wojas' daughter is serving a life without parole sentence for having her teenage lover kill her husband.

to a location they won't disclose. They collect mail at a post office box; even Pam's supporters don't have their home telephone number. Their other two children live out of state.

Linda Wojas once dreamed of the grandchildren she would have. Now she has only Pam's little dog, the one made famous in the trial. Prosecutors said that when Smart coaxed her teenage lover to kill her husband because she feared losing everything in a divorce, she urged him to put the dog in the basement so it would not be traumatized.

"We should be insane. Really. I can't even believe this has happened to us," Wojas said. "We will never be well. And there will never be any victories here."

In October, Smart's last appeal — to the U.S. Supreme Court — was denied. Her parents were in their car on their way to see her at the Bedford Hills, N.Y., prison where she is incarcerated when they heard the news on the car radio.

The radio also was how they learned of their son-in-law's murder in 1988.

The incidents symbolize the omnipresence of the news media in the case. During the trial, the Boston Herald asked readers to call a 900-line to vote on Smart's guilt or innocence; a columnist wrote of "the lady in the electric green suit"; another article was devoted entirely to Smart's hairstyle and tailored courtroom

wardrobe.

"Mrs. Smart, always stylishly dressed, favors bright purple, tight-waisted skirts that hug a tiny waist and dresses with peplums — a flounce at the hipline — and generally wears her blonde hair pulled back with a large bow," went the story in The Eagle-Tribune of Lawrence, Mass.

"If she were a man, do you think they would be commenting on her trademark bow?" Linda Wojas asked. "Our sense of voyeurism jumps in here, too."

Ironically, Smart had studied communications in college and once hoped to be a television reporter.

The state's dominant television station provided gavel-to-gavel live coverage of the trial, which came at the height of the recession. That meant more people than usual probably tuned in because they had been laid off and were sitting around at home, Wojas said.

They listened to titillating details of the sex life of a skinny, pretty, successful high school media coordinator. They listened to disc jockeys dedicate songs to Smart on the radio — songs with titles like "Cold As Ice" and "Bitch." They bought T-shirts patterned with bullet holes and the caption, "I Dated Pam Smart."

"Do you know how easy it was

to say, 'Hang the bitch?' " Wojas asked.

Then there was the night the Wojases — Linda, John and their oldest daughter, Beth — listened on extensions as they got an anonymous telephone call from a man who claimed he had heard a juror talking in a bar about convicting Smart. Deliberations had begun, but Judge Douglas Gray had not yet sequestered the jury.

The juror denied it. The caller never identified himself, and deliberations continued.

"Will that man come forward? Will I say another novena for him?" Wojas asked. "Who's going to be big enough to do something?"

Another person claiming to have been in the jury pool wrote a letter after the verdict, saying one of the empaneled jurors had proclaimed Smart guilty before testimony began.

Linda Wojas spent a weekend calling every single person in the jury pool to ask if he or she had written the letter.

Nobody would admit to it; all wished her luck.

It galls her that she may have talked to the person who wrote the letter without knowing who it was.

"Sometimes there are reasons for things, and it's not up to us to know why," she said. "People say, 'You need to get on with your life.' What life?"